A Stronger United Nations for a Better World

My Priorities as United Nations Secretary-General

Ban Ki-moon

The spirit and vision that infused world leaders in 1945 inspire me every day. The United Nations Charter embodies such trust and hope — a Magna Carta to lead a world ravaged by war and unspeakable atrocities to a new association of nations guided by the principles of justice, peace, equality and human rights. The promise and values of those early years in the UN's history are as relevant today in our considerably more complex and interdependent world as they were over 60 years ago. It is in precisely such an environment of global challenges that the UN can thrive — these are the challenges that do not respect borders, and which no country, rich or poor, weak or powerful, can resolve on its own.

In the last 60 years, the UN has shown it can:

- Serve as a forum to set a global agenda;
- Build consensus on contentious issues;
- Set standards for nations to live by;
- Play the role of honest broker;
- Keep fighting parties apart;
- Help bring justice to those discriminated against;
- Deliver humanitarian assistance and ensure access to food, medicine, education and health care;
- Improve living conditions and alleviate poverty;
- Pursue a vigorous development agenda.

Guiding principles that will drive my actions

As Secretary-General, I resolve to:

- Lead by example;
- Seek excellence with humility;
- Set the highest ethical standard;
- Pursue dialogue and engagement;
- Play the role of harmonizer and bridge-builder;
- Make transparency and accountability the cornerstone of my tenure;
- Be animated by both passion and compassion in achieving our goals;
- Be sensitive to the concerns of all Member States, big and small.

The challenges we face today are many, and my resolve is strong. I am determined to make progress on the pressing issues of our time, step by step, by building on achievements along the way, working with Member States and civil society.

Priorities for action

Peace and security: We must strengthen the UN's ability to play its role to the fullest extent in conflict prevention, peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding — these are all part of a continuum, and our approach must be integrated, coordinated and comprehensive. By enhancing our capacity for preventive diplomacy and supporting sustainable peace processes, we will build long-term solutions and respond more effectively to conflict.

"Now we have a historic opportunity. We must seize it."

Africa: Some 65 per cent of the UN peacekeeping budget is devoted to Africa. But to tackle the problem of conflicts in Africa, we need to address its root causes. Peacekeeping must therefore be accompanied by political processes to resolve conflicts, and development must be prioritized to secure an enduring peace. Sudan requires our special attention. The pace of implementation of the 2005 agreement that ended the long-running civil war between North and South must be accelerated, including the preparation of elections in 2009. To end the tragedy of Darfur, now that we have agreement on an African Union–United Nations force, we must get boots on the ground quickly. The root causes of the conflict have to be tackled, and the parties must move to comprehensive peace talks.

"With creativity and persistence, and the right mix of firmness and flexibility, we can find the path that has eluded us for so long."

Middle East: The region is as complex, fragile and dangerous as it has ever been, and yet there are opportunities for reconciliation to be grasped. On the deep mistrust between Palestinians and Israelis that forestalls a meaningful peace process, a constructive UN role within the Quartet and in support of the Arab Peace Initiative will hopefully encourage movement towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. Iraq is the whole world's problem. We are all aware of the road that brought us to this point, but the UN can be instrumental in developing an inclusive political process to promote national reconciliation, in cultivating a regional environment that is more stable and in providing humanitarian assistance to innocent civilians, including the almost 4 million refugees and internally displaced Iraqis.

"We need to invigorate disarmament and non-proliferation efforts."

Non-proliferation and disarmament: The risk of proliferation of nuclear and other weapons hangs like a sword of Damocles over our heads. The Security Council has taken some significant steps to pursue the goal of non-proliferation in North Korea and Iran. On North Korea, I am personally committed to facilitating the smooth progress of the Six-Party process, and to encouraging the work of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

"Development is not about charity — but about concrete actions to promote aid, trade and debt relief."

Development: While threats to peace must be addressed, my concern lies equally with those men, women and children of the world struggling to make ends meet — it is intolerable that almost 1 billion people still live on less than $1 a day. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a blueprint to ensure that in a technology-rich and prosperous twenty-first century, no human being should be dying of malnutrition or preventable diseases, or be deprived of education or access to basic health care. Treatment, prevention, care and support for HIV victims can be brought within everyone's reach, and this deadly epidemic must be reined in. We must spare no effort in reaching the MDGs, particularly in Africa. I will mobilize political will and hold leaders to their commitment to allocate adequate resources and development aid — and to address disparities in the global trade regime which handcuff so many developing nations.

"All nations are vulnerable to the impact of global warming."

Climate change: If we care about our legacy for succeeding generations, this is the time for decisive global action. The UN is the natural forum for building consensus and negotiating future global action — all nations can take firm steps towards being carbon-neutral. The September 2007 high-level event must set in motion the impetus for leaders to look ahead to the discussions on the UN Framework Convention in December 2007 and send the message — this is no longer business as usual. We must galvanize political will across the developing and industrialized nations of the world to ensure that negotiations bring results.

"The UN is the world's moral conscience."

Human rights: If security and development are two pillars of the UN's work, human rights is the third. The promise contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which will mark its sixtieth anniversary in 2008, must continue to drive actions on the ground. The Human Rights Council must live up to its responsibilities as the torch-bearer for human rights consistently and equitably around the world. The expression "never again" must hold real meaning. I will strive to translate the concept of the Responsibility to Protect from words to deeds to ensure timely action when populations face genocide, ethnic cleansing or crimes against humanity.

"Transforming the United Nations will require patience, perseverance and courage."

UN reform: Effectiveness and rationalization have to be the touchstone of how the Organization measures up to new challenges. We must simplify and streamline our rules, policies and processes, and align our practices with the best from both private and public sectors. Reform is needed because the UN and its staff must adapt to meet new needs — and while we do more with less, we must work with all stakeholders to obtain the resources and support we need for key management reforms. By ensuring the highest standards of ethics, integrity and accountability, we can show that we are fully answerable to all Member States and the world's public.

"I am optimistic that the world is changing in the UN's favour — that more people and Governments understand that multilateralism is the only path in an interdependent and globalizing world."

Global problems demand global solutions — and going it alone is not a viable option. Some may say this is looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. I believe, irrepressible optimist that I am, that we have come full circle since that magical moment in San Francisco over 60 years ago. The UN is more in demand than ever before — and it is because expectations are so high that the possibility of disappointment is also high. I do not believe in miracles, but I do have faith in human decency, diligence and incremental progress. Above all, I believe in results, not rhetoric. The fundamental purposes and principles of this Organization are inspiring and enduring — we need to renew our pledge to live up to them. My partners in this noble enterprise are the Member States and civil society. Their commitment, action and perseverance will serve as the engine propelling us to fulfil the promise of 1945.

"We will be judged in the future on the actions we take today — on results."

Ki Moon Ban

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